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ABSTRACT

The validity of adolescents' responses to questions about the quality of their relationships with parents and peers is often limited by memory distortions, stereotypic response tendencies, and social desirability. In order to obtain more detailed reports about their behavior than is possible using questionnaires, and to investigate the relationship between parent and peer involvement and the association between conflict with parents and peer orientation, a time use methodology was developed. Reports on time use and parent conflict over a 3-day period were obtained from 64 adolescents through telephone interviews. Free time, task time, and measures of conflict were assessed. Data analyses showed that adolescents spent equal amounts of time with parents and peers, but engaged in different types of activities with these two groups, i.e., work and task activities with parents and play and recreation with peers. Time spent with parents was negatively correlated with peer time for females and with time spent alone for males. Adolescents who had disagreeable relations with their mothers spent much of their time with their fathers, not with peers. The sex differences revealed support the idea that males and females follow very different developmental pathways in separating from their parents. (Author/JAC)

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Arguments With Parents and Parent-Peer Involvement During Adolescence

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between parent and peer involvement during adolescence, and the association between conflict with parents and a peer orientation. Reports of time use and parental conflict over a three-day period were obtained from 64 adolescents through telephone interviews. Three findings were uncovered: first, adolescents spent equal amounts of time with parents and peers, but engaged in very different types of activities with those two groups -- work and task activities with parents, and play and recreation with peers; second, time spent with parents was negatively correlated with peer time for females and time spent alone for males; and third, adolescents who had disagreeable relations with their mothers spent much of their time with their fathers and not with peers.

Arguments With Parents and Parent-Peer Involvement During Adolescence

Few studies have directly examined the association between peer involvement during adolescence and the quality of the parental relationship, and most of those that do exist have employed a questionnaire methodology. Unfortunately, the validity of adolescents' responses to questions about the general quality of the parent-adolescent relationship, average amount of conflict with parents, and overall preferences for parents and peers may be severely limited by distortions of memory, stereotypic response tendencies, and social desirability.

In the present study a time-use methodology was developed for adolescents in order to obtain more detailed reports about their everyday behavior than has been possible using questionnaires. These reports were used to examine the relationship between parent and peer involvement, and the association between conflict with parents and a peer orientation.

Method

A random sample of 64 adolescents with an average age of 15.2 years took part in the study (N = 30 males and 34 females). None were currently in psychotherapy, and all were white and from middle-class, intact families.

Each adolescent was interviewed over the telephone on three randomly selected evenings during any day of the week at approximately one week intervals. Adolescents were asked to recount the events of the preceding day from the time they woke up until the time they went to bed, excluding the time spent in school. For each activity, adolescents indicated how long they spent in that activity and with whom they interacted, if anyone. In addition, adolescents were asked to describe any conflicts with their parents during that day.

The following variables were coded from the three daily records obtained from each adolescent. Free time included any recreational activity in which the adolescent was free to take part or not. Task time was defined as any non-paid

work or social commitment in which the adolescent had little choice about participating. The amount of free and task time was calculated for each of the following social situations: mother-adolescent, father absent; father-adolescent, mother absent; mother-father-adolescent; peers-adolescent; and alone. Three measures of conflict were obtained from the adolescent narratives. Frequency of conflict episodes, intensity of conflict, assessed with a 3-point scale, and duration of conflict, based on the adolescents' estimates in minutes of how long each conflict lasted.

Ten pretest adolescents were interviewed before the study began to assess reliability. Interrater agreement was 89% for type of time and 98% for social situation. Each mother of the 10 pretest adolescents was also interviewed and asked to describe how she and her adolescent spent the previous day. The mother-adolescent correlations for the amount of free time and task time spent together were $r = .78$ and $r = .85$, respectively.

Results

In order to examine the relationship between time spent with parents and peers a new category of time with either parent was constructed from the total amount of time spent with parents. These data were then used in a 2 Sex of Adolescent (male, female) by 2 Type of Time (free, task) by 3 Social Situation (parents, peers, alone) repeated measures ANOVA which revealed a significant Type of Time by Social Situation interaction, $F(2, 124) = 36.53$, $p < .001$. Adolescents spent significantly more free time with peers, 449 minutes, than with parents, 248 minutes, or alone, 241 minutes. In regard to task time, adolescents spent 362 minutes alone, 211 minutes with parents, and 75 minutes with peers, all at which were significantly different from each other.

The correlation coefficients for eight combinations of time use and social

situation are given in Table 1 for males and females separately. In general, time spent with parents was inversely related to time spent alone for males, and time spent with peers for females.

Insert Table 1 about here

Males reported 17 conflicts with their mothers and 11 with fathers, while females reported 34 conflicts with their mothers and 6 with fathers. A Chi Square test performed on these data revealed a significant difference in the distribution of parent-adolescent conflicts, $X^2(1) = 5.18$, $p < .05$. In general, 75.0% of conflicts were with mothers and 25.0% with fathers. In particular, the mother-adolescent dyad was more contentious than any other relationship as revealed by the fact that 85.0% of all female conflicts were with their mothers. This conclusion is further strengthened by examining the duration and intensity of conflicts. A 2 Sex of Adolescent by 2 Parent ANOVA revealed a significant Sex of Adolescent by Parent interaction for both duration, $F(1, 64) = 4.08$, $p < .05$., and intensity, $F(1, 64) = 5.92$, $p < .05$. Arguments between mothers and daughters were more intense and longer than arguments between any other pair.

Finally, in order to examine the relationship between adolescent time use and conflicts with parents, correlation coefficients were computed between eight combinations of time use and social situation and number of conflicts with mothers and fathers. Only two correlations were significant -- number of conflicts with mothers was positively correlated with father-son free time, $r(28) = .43$, $p < .05$, and father-daughter task time, $r(32) = .34$, $p < .05$.

Discussion

The results from this study indicate that conflict with parents and involvement with parents and peers during adolescence are interrelated in a complex pattern that includes such variables as the type of time, the amount of time

adolescents spend alone, and the different relationships that adolescents have with their mothers and fathers. Based on the findings from this study three conclusions are warranted. First, adolescents are about equally involved with parents and peers, but spend very different types of time with these two groups. Time with parents mainly centers around the completion of a variety of social and household tasks such as eating, shopping, and performing home chores, while peer time is spent in entertainment, game playing, and talking. Second, the worlds of parents and peers are in competition for females only, while males choose between being with parents and being alone. These sex differences support the idea that males and females follow very different developmental pathways in the process of separating from their parents. Females take time away from parents to spend it in interaction with their peers as they develop interpersonal competence, while males spend their time alone in pursuit of the intrapersonal goals of instrumental competence through hobbies, sports, and work. Third, adolescents who have disagreeable relations with their mothers spend much of their time with fathers and not with peers. Fathers may serve as a kind of emotional reserve who adolescents seek out for companionship and support mainly when their relationship with their mother is stressful.

Table 1

Intercorrelations of Type of Time Use and Social Situation for Males and Females

	Mother		Father		Peers		Alone	
	Free	Task	Free	Task	Free	Task	Free	Task
Mother								
Free			.59***				-.37*	-.39*
Task				.65***				
Father								
Free	.67***						-.36*	
Task		.33*						
Peers								
Free	-.43**	-.37*						
Task	-.33*		-.42**					
Alone								
Free						-.33*		-.36*
Task			-.33*					

Note. Correlation coefficients above the diagonal are for males (N = 30) below, females (N = 34). Only correlation coefficients which are significant are reprinted here.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$